

Vengeance

Kawkab al-Sharq, 31 July 1933

The Unionists were intoxicated with the resounding victory they had won when they celebrated the Minister of Traditions on Thursday evening: they drank tea and poured it for others, they heard speeches and delivered them in turn, and so they digested what they had drunk and eaten while they went on working over what they had heard and said—swallowing some of it with difficulty, while the rest lingered in their chests and throats, refusing to go down.

The Populists, for their part, were stung by this victory won by their rival party; they could neither accept it, nor stomach it, nor close their eyes to it. And so they set about preparing a celebration to match the celebration, a meal better than the meal, a drink better than the drink. They too prepared long speeches, to be delivered by the Minister and the Minister's supporters. Word for word, feast for feast. A night in San Stefano answered by a day in Windsor. The Ministry's circle reckoned the victory it had already won over the offices of the Daily Telegraph and over those upstarts "at whose beards we laughed," as the Minister of Traditions put it; and it reckoned, too, the victory it would yet win over those opponents "whose discernment passions and private interests have blinded," as the Minister of Agriculture put it. And all the while, the blood of Egyptians was flowing, staining the soil of Egypt, and the souls of Egyptians were departing, rising into the sky. And it was Egyptian hands that shed Egyptian blood and took Egyptian lives. The fury and rage of a group of Egyptians had reached its utmost pitch. The devils of sin and crime had so possessed the hearts of a group of Egyptians that their hearts no longer felt, their minds no longer thought, and their hands fired guns, wielded swords, plunged daggers into chests, swung clubs to smash skulls, and spilled the blood of Muslims upon one of the houses of God.

This took place on a Friday, just after the prayer, as people were leaving that place from which souls ought to emerge pure of all defilement, cleansed of all sin. All of this happened on a Friday, and it did not last a minute or two minutes, nor a moment or a few moments, but went on for no short while—during which sanctities were violated and a small child was killed in the very arms of the mother who was carrying

him.

All of this happened, and yet it did not happen suddenly or by chance; rather, it came after preliminaries had been laid before it, after the means for it had been prepared, and after watchers had been set in wait for it. It may be said that the feud between the two contending parties was an old one; it may be said that a quarrel had broken out between individuals of the contending sides, giving warning of trouble and signalling that some calamity might well occur.

All of this happened on a Friday, and a village among the villages of Egypt—not far from the capital—was transformed into one of those battlefields where people do not fight face to face, but where the ground is instead a tangled snare, where some lie in ambush for others, where some plot against others, and where some send death to others from a direction they neither expect nor await. The newspapers told us that a group of this village's inhabitants attacked one of its houses; the people of the house barred their doors, so the attackers set about breaking down the door and forcing their way in; and when that proved difficult, they turned instead to one of the house's walls to tear it down, after which they forced their way into the house and killed and wounded those within.

The small detachment of police stationed in this village sensed the trouble at its outset, or toward its end, or in the midst of it, and set about suppressing it, but found no way to do so. They called upon the central authority for help, and reinforcements arrived after four and more had already been killed and the wounded numbered above twenty. The prosecution has been investigating ever since. Before this, a village in Upper Egypt had likewise been assaulted; and before or after that—I do not know which—another village in Upper Egypt clashed with yet another. Both of these encounters left casualties, dead and wounded alike. Before and after all this, the newspapers have informed us that people are sometimes struck down on the public road, and at other times on the very doorsteps of their houses. Meanwhile, our correspondents for al-Kawkab in some of the provinces inform us that a police officer struck a man on the head and killed him, whereupon the administration granted him a leave—to rest, or to do what, I do not know. Were you to relate this, or anything of it, to a man speaking of some other country, that man would have no doubt that you were speaking to him of a country in which everything had gone to ruin, in which everything had turned for the

worse, in which people's blood, lives, and sanctities had become cheap in the eyes of all. And it would become the plain duty of those in authority there to search, earnestly and not in jest, for some way to restore to life and to sanctity their worth, and to law and authority their majesty. Nor, perhaps, would that man hesitate to ask: how is it that the government of this country has not taken exceptional measures to protect security and preserve order? For the ordinary legal measures must surely be powerless to achieve this, falling short of reaching it or attaining it. And if you were further to tell your friend that the people of this country can scarcely let a few days pass without the morning papers informing them that a bomb has gone off in some quarter, along some railway line, or near some public-works building, your listener would have no doubt that life in such a country is not something to be loved or desired. And yet such, in these very days, is the condition of Egypt: all these incidents occur within it, all these crimes follow one upon another, and its people are exposed to every such danger—while its ministers deliver speeches, now in Windsor, now in San Stefano, recalling how “we laughed at the Egyptians' beards,” and how the passions of the opposition have “blinded their discernment,” before boarding ships bound for a happy, sweet summer full of pleasure and ease, of luxury and comfort.

As for our Minister of the Interior—by the testimony of the offices of the Daily Telegraph, which the Prime Minister, the Minister of Religious Endowments, the Minister of Traditions, the Minister of Agriculture, and their supporters all confirm—our Minister of the Interior is the strongest of ministers and the most capable of ministers, the most able of all ministers at satisfying everyone and winning everyone's trust. And this is true of him, without doubt, for he does not give speeches, does not write, does not mention the English, and does not mention the Egyptians; he attacks neither this side nor that with his tongue, nor does he defend either side with his tongue. He is, for all this, well disposed to be approved of by everyone—lacking only one single thing to attain that universal approval, namely, that he succeed in carrying out the duty for the sake of which he rose to the Ministry, and for the sake of which he was entrusted with the lives, freedoms, interests, and property of the people: that he secure for them security—the security of the people, not the security of the Ministry—that he establish for them order in truth, and that he enable every one of them to enter a mosque and leave it again without being struck down upon its threshold, and without that threshold being stained with his unlawfully shed blood.

It is for this, before all else, that the Minister of the Interior rose to his post; it is to this, before all else, that the Minister of the Interior ought to attend; it is on this, before all else, that the Minister of the Interior ought to spend his time and effort; indeed, it is for this, before all else, that the Council of Ministers convenes, and it is on this, before all else, that the Council of Ministers ought to busy itself. Yet here it is, occupying itself—more urgently, it would seem, than the very life of Egypt—with building a garage for government cars in Alexandria, with purchasing aircraft before the aviation conference has even convened, and with replying to the offices of the Daily Telegraph and to certain Egyptian writers in the Egyptian press. And it is a strange thing indeed that our Minister of the Interior should be the ablest of all ministers, by every reasonable measure, at maintaining security and establishing order, for he is a man who has spent his whole life in administration: he served long years in public security, long years in the Ministry of the Interior's directorate, and he is now Minister of the Interior himself. He did not borrow his ministry on loan from the judiciary, or from the legal profession, or from any other corner of public life; rather, he took charge of the Ministry of the Interior with full knowledge of its affairs and mastery of its workings. He is a man of craft and skill, a man of insight and experience—how, then, has security broken down and order fallen into such strange and outrageous disarray under his tenure? Is he, do you suppose, simply unlucky? Or is he, do you suppose, too occupied with matters that exhaust his time, his effort, and his competence to attend to security and order? Or is it, perhaps, that affairs in this country have so far decayed that no path to their reform remains, except that some men depart and others succeed them? This is known to the ministers, and to all the people, and to the offices of the Daily Telegraph, and to that trusted source which whispered to the offices of the Daily Telegraph. But what use is it whether this be known or unknown, so long as the evil continues to occur and to follow upon itself, and its outrageous consequences continue to appear, while scarcely anyone troubles himself about it—until Egypt has become, yes, Egypt itself, like those tracts of desert people speak of, where tribe raids tribe and tribe makes war upon tribe, and where people take their own vengeance for themselves. What are we to say? Reports abound that the Saudi Arabian government has established, in the deserts of the Arabian peninsula, a security that Egypt cannot even dream of: raiding and pillaging have ceased there, and people are secure whether travelling by night or by day. And why not?

The Saudi Arabian government has no parliamentary delegation to fight and pursue, none to occupy it in combat and pursuit, distracting it from tracking down criminals and protecting lives and property.

Be that as it may, the people of Nazlat al-Shawbak have managed to take their vengeance upon one another; the People's Party has managed to take its vengeance upon the Unionist Party; and the Ministry has managed to take its vengeance upon the offices of the Daily Telegraph. Our Minister of the Interior, God willing, is well able to tell us which of these vengeance is most deserving of his attention and thought.